

The WestMED Initiative

Boosting the sustainable blue economy in the Western Mediterranean

Port Districts as Hubs for Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Skills

Green Marine Med Bootcamp – May 21st, 2025, online

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WESTMED
blue economy initiative

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Port Districts as Hubs for Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Skills

Ports, as areas where economic activities are concentrated, for the exploitation of a large number of operations, have always been gateways for entrepreneurship and innovation of business models first.

The “bio-diversity” of economic operators working there, as well as, the sectoral (or multi-sectoral) vocation of the port, are the main factors which generate the challenges that the ports communities have to tackle:

- environmental, economic and financial sustainability;
- decarbonization and energy efficiency hubs;
- large investments needed to upgrade infrastructures;
- new advanced services to operate in compliance with the complex international regulatory framework;
- highly skilled human resources and continuous training/VET activities for all categories of operators;
- the economic role of the port towards the surrounding territory and beyond.

Port Districts as Hubs for Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Skills

The capacity of the Port Community to tackle and properly respond to these challenges is determining its competitiveness, because shipowners determine their routes according to the infrastructures, capacities and services that they may find in that specific port.

And once the level of infrastructures, capacities and services is kept at the required standards of the market, these routes consolidate and continue to provide traffic, wealth, and opportunities to the involved territories.

Therefore Ports are required today to be able to adapt their business and management model, relying on the skills that their Port Communities express:

- aggregation of economic operators;
- repository of know-how, experiences and skills;
- availability of technological platforms to uptake innovation and promote further progress

resume the key factors to enhance competitiveness in a Port area, saving the single operators from investing individually to build their own capacities.

Port Districts as Hubs for Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Skills

- Port Communities/Clusters help to increase collaboration among operators, improve their synergies, optimize the commercial expansion towards new international partnerships; support Port Authorities in the comprehensive assessment and analysis of phenomena, with the subsequent decision taking process; advocate together towards policy makers, making valuable the role of their port for the whole economy; are able to represent in better ways the needs and the opportunities towards potential investors, etc;
- Ports which will to play a driving role cannot ignore the need to have an “intelligence structure” (Centers of Excellence?) where legislative and regulatory frameworks are studied, understood and translated into operative models; where a dedicated team has to “possess” the business and management models, and their technological implications, as well as to “equip” the Port with the capacities to adopt new technologies, solutions, with their environmental, economic and financial sustainability; where there is awareness of the funding and financial resources which could support/bring the required investments;
- Digital infrastructure, data centers, laboratories, energy and environmental hubs, testing areas become strategic assets for the Port to operate the complex network of devices, as well as to further develop new capacities.

Port Districts as Hubs for Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Skills

In this scenario, the strict integration of the Port Community with the:

- local/national/regional policy makers, the financial community and investors, the surrounding economic and industrial landscape;
- universities, research institutes, the technological centers;
- comprehensive system of secondary schools, universities and higher education institutions;
- civil society

represent a decisive competitive factor, because not all skills and know-how may be self-produced. Territorial synergies are fundamental.

A bright example: the extraordinary role of fishery ports

While the sector of Fishery is seeking a new sustainable model to preserve marine resources and life to coastal communities, Aquaculture has become a really production sector.

Both supply chains require same or similar products and services, allowing Fishery Ports to gain a more comprehensive role:

- collection, processing and cold storage operations, packing&packaging facilities;

- ice production; water management, desalination, waste management;

- shipyards, for construction and/or repair;

- sanitary, biotech and research laboratories;

- energy generation, with renewable sources and alternative fuels;

- synergic logistics&mobility;

- banking, commercial and financial services;

- training facilities;

- catering, cooking and new food productions, etc.

THEMATIC STAKEHOLDER GROUPS



**Green shipping
and ports
Technical Group**



**Aquaculture
Technical Group**



**Maritime
Clusters Alliance**



**Maritime Spatial
Planning
Community of
Practice**

Technical Group **GREEN SHIPPING**

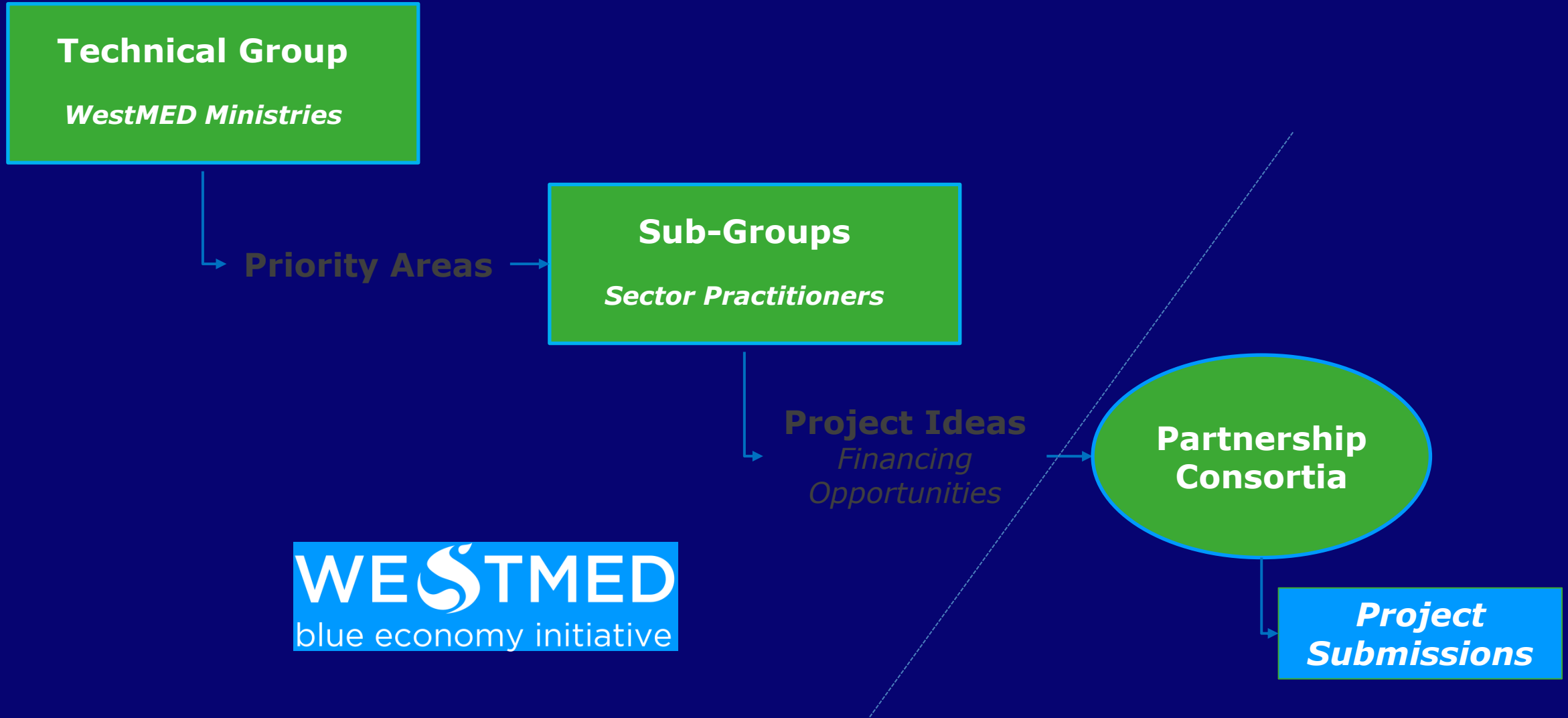


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WestMED Green Shipping: Technical Group

Process in identification and support of Priority Actions



Focus on implementing the identified project 'concepts'

Feasibility Study Assessment and country feasibility

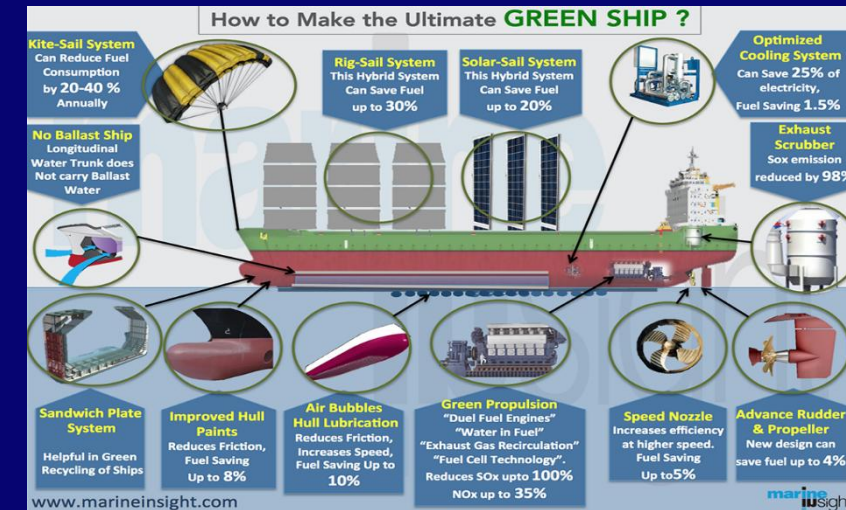
Analyse the foreseen trends in energy consumption, practices and opportunities for strategic development of the infrastructure to boost sustainable sources for green shipping

Pilot Action 1 Network of ports as energy communities (hubs)

Western Mediterranean ports can play a leading role in **piloting the transformation of green ports into active 'energy communities'** (by accelerating the transition from LNG towards a wider choice of alternative fuels/technologies, including hydrogen, electrification, etc.)

Pilot Action 2: Adaptation of commercial vessels

Support to commercial vessels (including local small-scale ferries and service vessels) in accelerating their transition to sustainable energy – from LNG towards a wider choice of alternative fuels/technologies (hydrogen, electrification)



Continuity of Priorities & Development

First WMAM round of the TG on Green Shipping:

- Observatory on technological chains
- Energy Communities in Ports
- Fleets renewal and refitting

Second WMAM round of the TG on Green Shipping:

- Observatory on technological chains: create a WM_Mediterranean supply chain of technological chains identified (incl a sustainability rating system)
- Energy Communities in Ports: establishing a WM driving group of Energy Communities in Ports
- Fleets renewal and refitting: create a WM_Mediterranean supply chain (incl a sustainability rating system, ref existing systems and specialized companies)

Synergies between WestMED and the Atlantic sea within the framework of Pillar 1: Atlantic ports as gateways and hubs for the blue economy

Tightening the established relations with the other thematic stakeholders platforms and multilateral organizations (REMPEC, MedPorts, CETMO, ZEWT Waterborne Partnership, MedCities)

GREEN SHIPPING AND PORTS

- **Three EMFAF projects** awarded funding (Green Marine Med, POWER4MED and CALLMEBLUE)
- Follow-up to CETMO reports: The 'Centre d'études des transports pour la Méditerranée occidentale') encouraging cooperation related to transport in the Western Mediterranean
 - **Develop the concept of "connectivity"** (from east to west and towards southern countries)
- **Main priorities:**
 - Technology chain observatory
 - Ports as energy communities
 - Fleet renewal and refitting
- **Other emerging topics: innovation in green public procurement in ports, sustainability in small ports** Synergies permanentes with REMPEC, MEDPORTS, CETMO, technology platform for maritime transport (Waterborne transports)



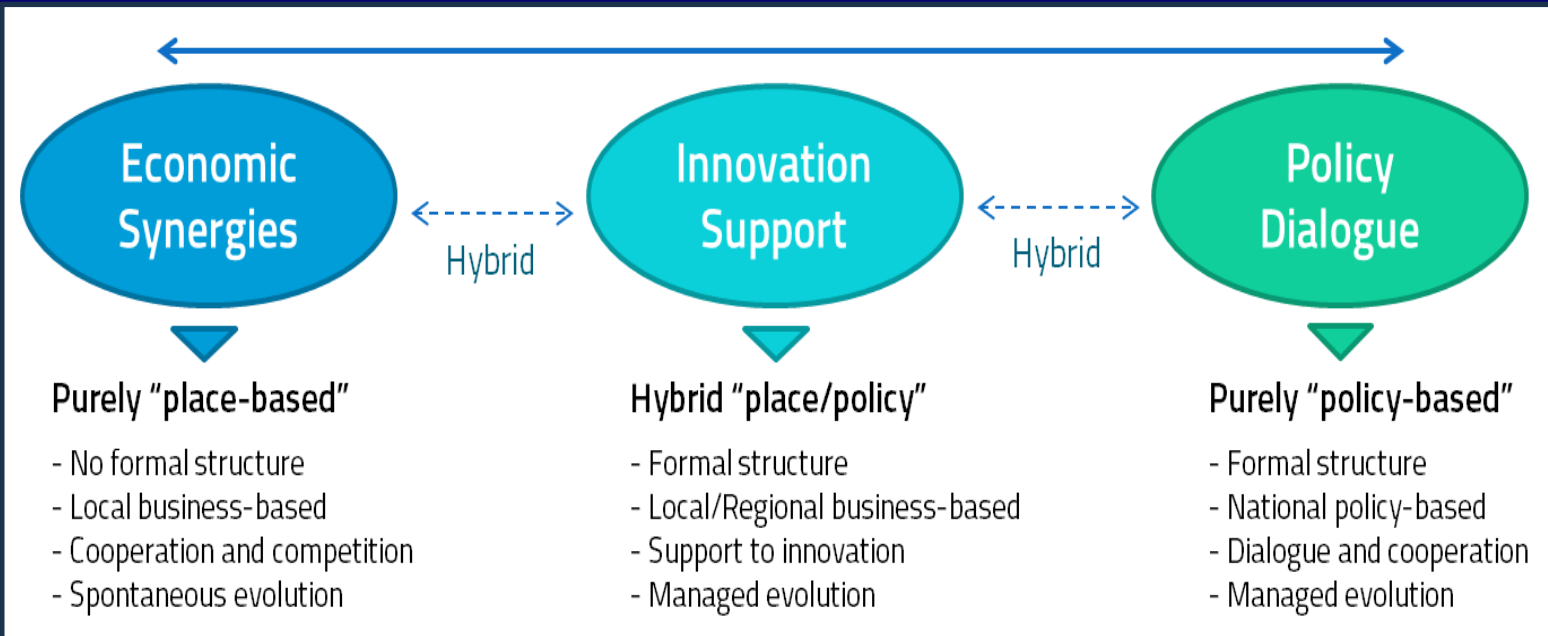
MEANING OF CLUSTERS

- Clusters have been originally defined as “geographically proximate group of interconnected companies, associated institutions and research bodies, in turns linked by commonalities and complementarities” (Porter, 1998).
- Clusters are strongly related to the social and economic history, and therefore to the productive vocation of the territories (historical role of large « national » companies;
- The form of aggregation that a Cluster may adopt are various (association, consortium, federation, foundation, academic centre, ONG etc).
- Transition from the sectoral to the challenge concept.
- Clusters manager may respond to different profiles, according to the goals and the activities of the aggregation (advocacy capacities, recognized sectoral leadership, R&I stimulation, business developer, project manager). He has to know the territory, the sector(s), the international contest.
- 3 main profiles of Cluster Manager: R&I (academic) leader, experienced manager, “animator” (mostly coming from the professional bodies).



CLUSTERS: TYPOLOGIES AND OBJECTIVES

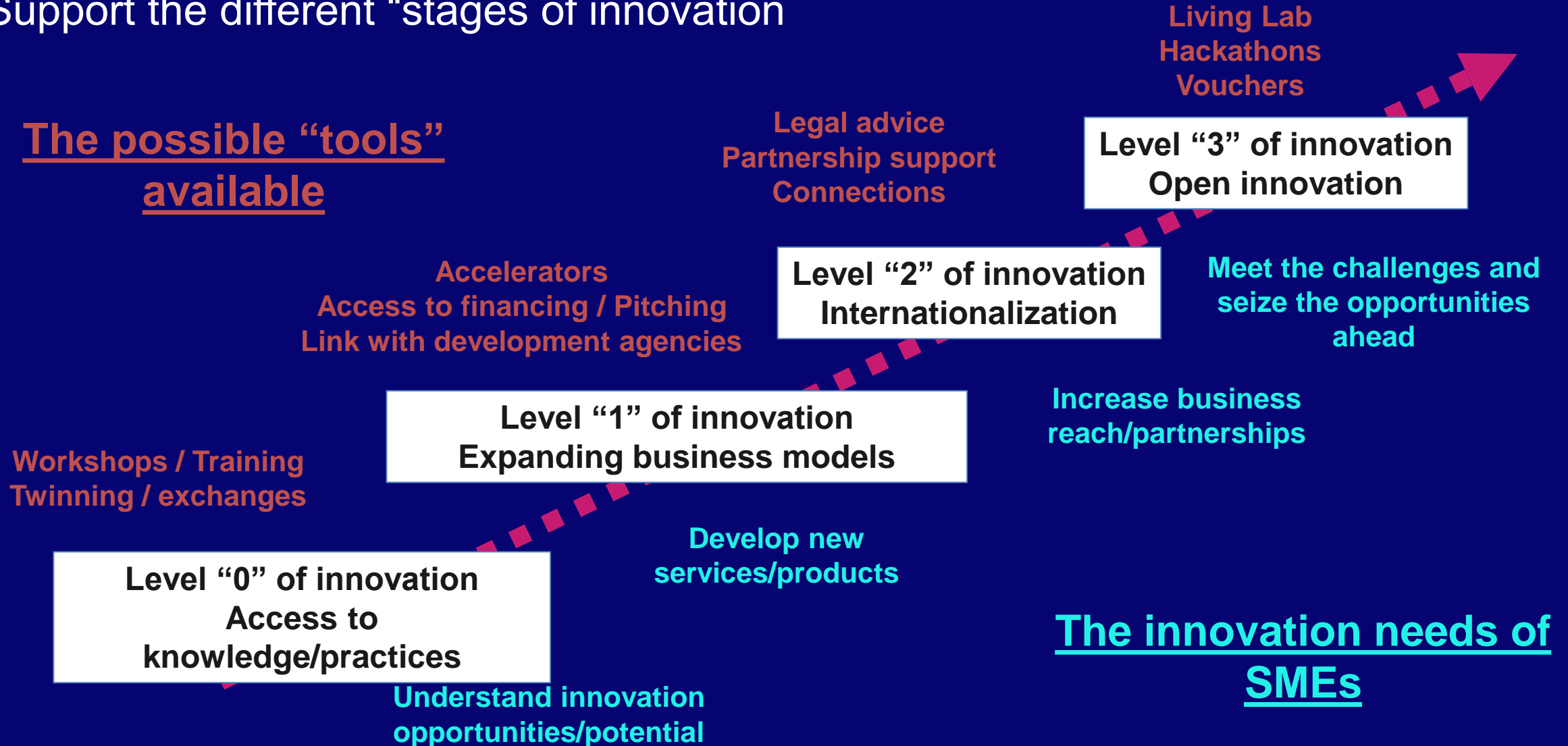
- Three ideal types have appeared in literature and practices, with an important role for “hybrid” forms.
- These hybrid forms are structured groupings aimed at meeting local needs in terms of innovation, knowledge, financing, etc.
- The development and analysis mainly focused on these (note: existing practices are less clearly attributable to a model)



Les clusters ont été définis à l'origine comme des « groupes géographiquement proches d'entreprises interconnectées, d'institutions associées et d'organismes de recherche, à leur tour liés par des points communs et des complémentarités » (Porter, 1998).

POTENTIALS

Support the different “stages of innovation



MARITIME CLUSTERS

AN IDEAL “BROKER” FOR LOCAL SMEs

Bring together and have direct access to a range of local stakeholders

Local and regional authorities

Fishery and
aquaculture

Research Centres

Marine Renewable Energies

**Maritime
Clusters**

Port Authorities

Tourism and
leisure

SMEs/Large companies

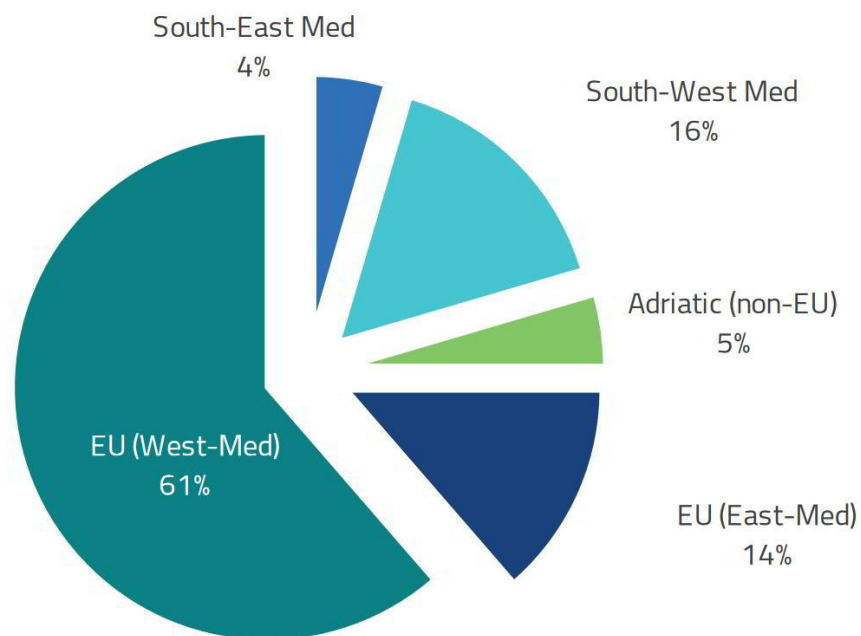
Transport and
logistics

Understanding local value chains and business ecosystems in the SME sector

WestMED

Developed but still needing support

Potential to be further exploited



Source: UfM (2019) – Maritime Clusters in the Mediterranean Region

An effective “platform” for stakeholders is already available





Main characteristics

June 2021: official launch

Maritime clusters - strategic actions

Geographic scope - priority to the north and west of the

Main activities

Dialogue between clusters: Pôle Mer Méditerranée (FR)

South-South Cooperation: Tunisian Maritime Cluster

North-South Capacity Building: Italian Blue Growth



Expanding membership

- Mauritania
- Libya
- Morocco?

Hub National ITALY



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